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ON THE COVER
BenDeLaCreme and Jinkx Monsoon will be coming to Minneapolis on Dec. 13 at the Cedar Cultural Center as part of their All I Want For Christmas Is Attention tour.
Photo by Eric Richard Magnussen, courtesy of Blake Zidell & Associates

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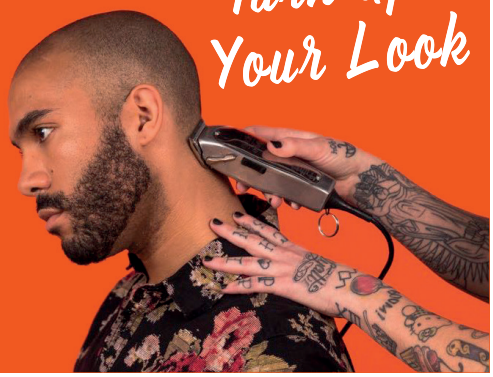

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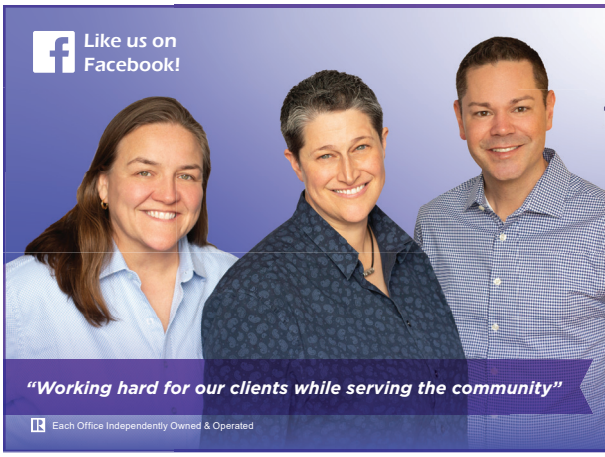

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FROM THE EDITOR | BY CHRIS TARBOX

You Oughta Snow

Batten down the hatches and dig out your fanciest scarf, because the winter season is officially upon us! Although I have to ask, did we even have an actual autumn this year? It's like summer decided to overstay its welcome throughout September, then once October arrived, Minnesota decided to roll out the red carpet for the cold snowy season early. Not fair, man, not fair.

But I digress! For us Minnesotans, winter is an inevitability that allows for tons of exciting events and activities to remind us that, in spite of the reduced sunlight and colder temperatures, it's not all that bad. From the Holidazzle and the (returning!) Art Shanty Projects, to LUSH's Christmas Cabaret and the Lake Harriet Kite Festival, there will be plenty of fun things for us to do in the Twin Cities and beyond over the next several months.

Enjoy, then, this edition of our annual Winter What To Do issue, where our titular guide lays out a plethora of winter events that'll rouse you from your hibernation. Also in this issue, yours truly will take you on a trip through the sun-soaked paradise of Palm Springs, and we also meet Dean Packingham, CEO of the delightful Mike & Jen's Cocoa Mix in Duluth.

Our friend Bradley Traynor also returns with a brand-new Eat The Menu piece on the fantastic Cecil's Deli in St. Paul, Carla Waldemar walks us through the wonders of Wichita and Kansas City, and we recap the amazing cruises taken by the 2018 and 2019 winners of *Lavender's* Cover and a Cruise contests!

So as far as the upcoming season goes, don't worry, folks. We got this. Bring it on, Old Man Winter. Do your worst.

Okay, not your worst. I was just kidding. Please be gentle. ∎

A WORD IN EDGEWISE | BY E.B. BOATNER

The Days Dwindle Down

October was a dark month. On the fourth, I learned my dear friend and college classmate, Dave S., had died after a lengthy hospital stay in Amsterdam, where he'd lived on his houseboat over thirty years; mid-month, my friend of over thirty (tumultuous) years, Jimmy F., called to say he'd received a devastating—though not unexpected—medical diagnosis; at month's end, I was shocked, reading that my passionate, prolific Lavender colleague and friend, John Townsend, had passed away suddenly, only hours after e-mailing one of his frequent news alerts.

Within the whirlwind of grief and remembrance, were mixed, I confess, thoughts of my own mortality, and the inadequacy of what for a better term I'll call, "appropriate nomenclature." "Colleague" and "Classmate" are straightforward, clear; "friend," even "dear friend," aren't adequate for decades-long relationships, and certainly don't encompass liaisons where the most benign descriptor is "fraught." Friendship never vouchsafes only well-lit, strait-gate paths; dead-ends, rifts may force retreats, regroupings, even abandonment.

Time brings perspective, or perhaps age just sets your vision to soft-focus, smoothing the rocky paths. Perhaps also, your own looming mortality helps you overlook things best forgotten, and remember instead that trout caught on the Canadian canoe trip on Lake Timagami, the one just swimming by, snagged by its gill. How delicious it was panfried over the fire that starry night!

Dave and I were born just seven weeks apart, well before Pearl Harbor; I'm seven years older than Jimmy; nearly two decades older than John. Numbers only. Actuarial tables can't really predict who goes when, or why, nor would I want to know. Each sad landmark, each diminution of the circle underscores the old saw: live in this moment. Live as though each day may be the last, a friend's, a loved one's, yours.

Whenever I go to the theater, I scan the house for John's distinctive shorn pate. I use the present tense here, because even at the recent opening of the Guthrie's *Steel Magnolias*, so hard upon the news of his passing, even knowing John wouldn't be there, even so… I spotted someone and started to say, "There's…" But no, it wasn't, and it won't be ever again, but that certainty won't stop the eye—or heart—from searching. ∎

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LAVENDER'S FIRST THURSDAY AT THE MARQUETTE HOTEL

NOV. 7, 2019

Photo by Sophia Hantzes

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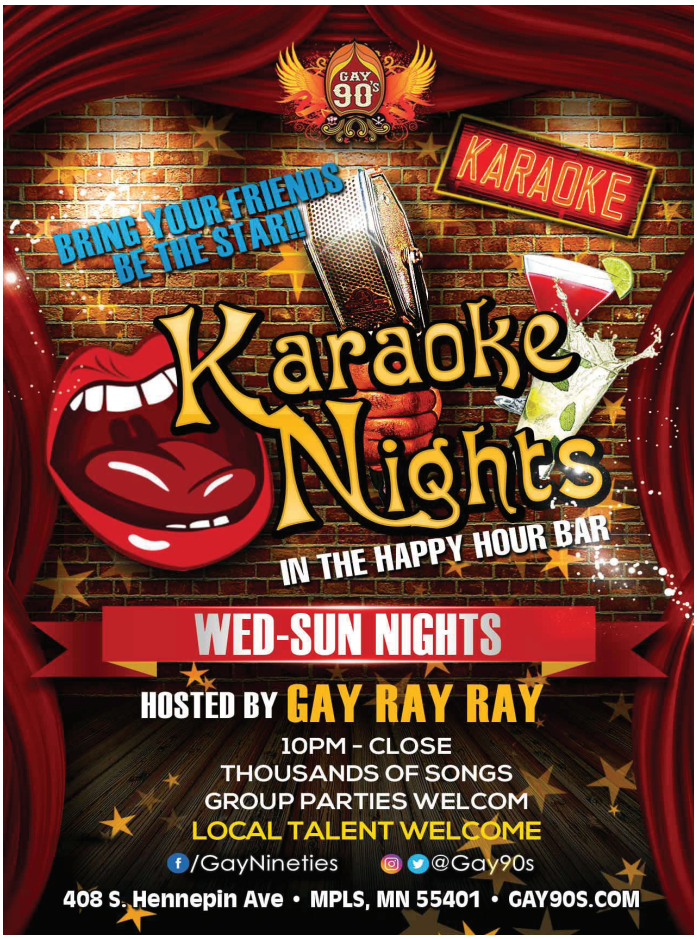

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THE VIKING AND THE GAZELLE

Through Dec. 15
Mixed Blood Theatre, 1501 S. 4th St.
Minneapolis
612-338-6131
mixedblood.com

A love story and an examination of race relations set in our own backyard, Waterfront Productions' *The Viking and The Gazelle* is a romantic comedy centered around the relationship of black, Chicago-born Michelle and white Robert, who was raised in the suburbs of Minneapolis. Like any good love story, theirs are beset by obstacles and challenges, including racial biases, culture clashes, and a deep secret held by Robert himself.

Written and produced by Dr. William Bengtson and Suzanne Bengston of Waterfront Productions, whose interracial relationship served as loose inspiration for the play's story, *The Viking and The Gazelle* is a light comedic journey that doesn't take itself too seriously, but still contributes to a frank sociological conversation. The production is an adaptation of the Bengtsons' Minnesota Fringe debut from this past August, boasting an upgraded script and production design.

The Viking and The Gazelle. Photo by Bruce Silcox

TOWARDS ZERO

Through Dec. 15
Theatre in the Round, 245 Cedar Ave.
Minneapolis
612-333-3010
www.theatreintheround.org

Discovered by a researcher in 2015, *Towards Zero* brings the expert twists and turns so common to Agatha Christie's oeuvre. Set at the English seaside clifftop manor known as Gull's Nest, Lady Tressilian invites her ward over for a long weekend, but, lo and behold, said ward also brings along his current wife and his old flame unannounced. The house party is soon turned upside down by a shocking murder, leaving the audience guessing until the very end.

Towards Zero boasts a 13-member cast directed by Wendy Resch Novak, featuring set design by Laurie Swigart, costumes by Deb Murphy, and lighting overseen by Peter Gustafson. Says Resch Novak per Theatre in the Round's site: "I always want the audience to consider all the possibilities while they are trying to identify the murderer. Therefore, the cast and I talked frequently about how to throw suspicion onto certain characters. You often do not know until after you receive feedback from the audience as to whether or not some of the conventions you implemented worked."

William Bauer, David Coral, Kristen C. Mathisen, Annie Day, and Ben Habel are among the production's cast. A post-show discussion will take place after the Sunday matinee on Dec. 1.

Another Miracle on Christmas Lake. Photo by Justin Cox

ANOTHER MIRACLE ON CHRISTMAS LAKE

Through Dec. 29
Yellowtree Theatre, 320 5th Ave. SE, Osseo
763-493-8733
yellowtreetheatre.com

Osseo's venerable Yellowtree Theatre presents the sequel to the smash hit comedy *Miracle on Christmas Lake*, with Martha, Neil, and a cadre of new characters teaming up to prevent their beloved town of Christmas Lake from being annexed. Meanwhile, Colin and Tess aim to draw tourists with a holiday pageant, all while a scout from Hollywood determines that Christmas Lake is the ideal location to film a remake of the Christmas classic film *It's A Wonderful Life.*

Quintessentially Minnesotan, with lutefisk and tater tots galore, this hilarious production will be the perfect way to amp up the holiday cheer. Written by Jessica Lind Peterson and directed by Jason Peterson, Another Miracle on Christmas Lake stars Ryan Nelson, Jason Ballweber, Elise Langer, Anna Leverett, Damian Leverett, Neil Skoy, and Abby Day.

Continued on page 14

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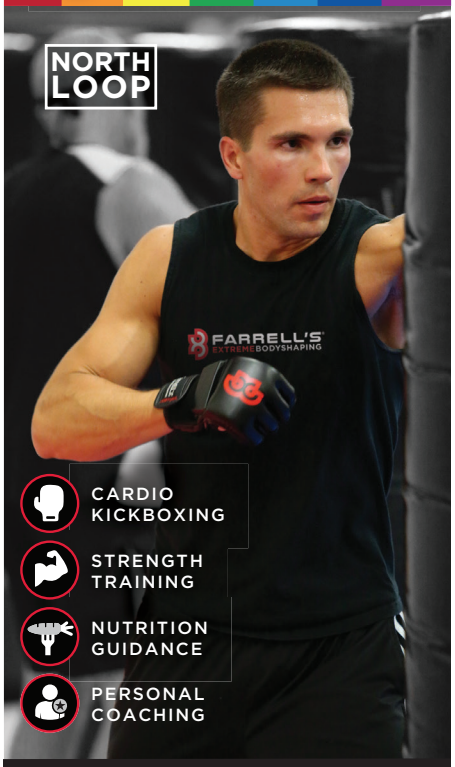

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The Band's Visit. Photo by Matthew Murphy

WHO BROUGHT THE HUMBUG?

Dec. 5-15
The Cowles Center, 528 Hennepin Ave.
Minneapolis
612-206-3600
www.thecowlescenter.org

Who, indeed? Laden with Broadway-level theatrics, incredible tap dancing action, and more, *Who Brought the Humbug?* is a holiday extravaganza courtesy of Ricci Milan and his Rhythm Street Movement performance troupe, who sold out The Lab Theater last year with their interactive, high-energy hijinks.

This family-friendly holiday performance at The Cowles Center will be characteristic of Rhythm Street Movement's usual blend of dance, music, and storytelling. Per the troupe's mission statement, Rhythm Street Movement seeks to make a positive impact on the community via original songs, dance, and other forms of creativity.

Who Brought The Humbug? Photo by Rhythm Street Movement

CHRISTMAS WITH THE CAMPBELLS

Dec. 6-21
Phoenix Theater, 2605 Hennepin Ave.
Minneapolis
612-377-2285
www.phoenixtheatermpls.org

Smartmouth Comedy Company brings its irreverent brand of humor to Phoenix Theater with the Kelliann Kary-written-and-directed *Christmas with the Campbells*, a three-act comedy following the Campbell family through their misadventures in holiday get-togethers, court-mandated therapy, and more.

The female-driven Smartmouth Comedy Co.'s mission is to encourage an inclusive, gender-neutral approach to comedy. The Friday, Dec. 13 performance of *Christmas with the Campbells* will be ASL interpreted and audio described.

Christmas with the Campbells. Photo by Greg Hodgson

THE BAND'S VISIT

Dec. 10-15
Orpheum Theatre, 910 Hennepin Ave.
Minneapolis
800-982-2787
hennepintheatretrust.org

The Tony- and Grammy-award winning musical arrives in Minneapolis, based on a 2007 Israeli motion picture of the same name. With a book by Itamar Moses and music and lyrics by David Yazbek, *The Band's Visit* chronicles the arrival of a lost band of Egyptian musicians in the Negev desert of southern Israel. Their gorgeous musical talents set the local town alight, enchanting townspeople such as a local restaurant owner Dina, who takes the band in.

The Band's Visit was nominated for 11 Tonys in 2018, winning ten, including Best Musical. This touring production will be directed by David Cromer, with choreography by Patrick McCollum. ∎

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TRAVEL | BY CARLA WALDEMAR | PHOTOS BY CARLA WALDEMAR

Kansas City is home to the H.C. Nichols Fountain at the Country Club Plaza.

Wichit...aah!

I'm hiking the Chisholm Trail; it says so on the street sign, and there's a massive bull standing there to prove it. But nowadays the trail through Wichita (a.k.a. Douglas Avenue) is lined with hair salons, a French bakery and a McDonald's, and the bull is made of stainless steel. But near him lies a store that sells headgear suited for a cowpoke.

Meet Hatman Jack—Jack Kellogg, owner of Wichita Hat Works, who began working here at age 15, and by 17 had bought out the owner. Since then, he's sold chapeaux to the likes of Luciano Pavarotti, Merle Haggard and Prince's band.

"Your face shape dictates what kind of hat you need," he counsels, adding, "If the hat isn't on correctly, it's on incorrectly." Jack specializes in making guys look great. And in revitalizing this corner of Kansas, called Delano (De-LAY-no to the locals). "Delano was for cowhands at the end of the trail: girls, booze and gambling," he recounts as he steams and shapes a snappy number for a customer. "This was the city's rotting core. We helped bring it back."

Delano, tour guide Lee Starkey reminisces, "was a rough neighborhood where respectable folks crossed over the river to be disrespectful." Today it draws folks to Delano Barbecue Company, where we chomp on tasty brisket and burnt ends. The building once served as

Wichita boasts Horizontales, the largest mural in North America.

studio for celebrated Native American artist Blackbear Bosun, whose iconic riverside sculpture, "Keeper of the Flame," blazes nightly with a ring of fire.

Follow the riverside path to the Mid-America All-Indian Center which he helped found. It celebrates today's Native culture with provocative artworks and talking points berating the Indian Barbie and feathered headdresses as Halloween costumes. Bosun's works here shine with Art Deco flair, and his mosaic murals of the city's history enrobe the ballroom of the Broadmoor Hotel.

Along Douglas, fountains and water features beautify historic storefronts, such as the City Hall of 1892 turned historical museum, replicating a sweet Victorian cottage and the Mayor's office of 1892, complete with spittoon. Inside, you'll find the ax Carrie Nation wielded in 1900 to attack nearby saloons.

Pause at Third Place Brewery, founded by two over-achievers—a surgeon and a test pilot—as the fifth (out of ten) breweries that hydrate the city. Then trek a few more steps and you're in the Design District, where the city's vibrant Mural Trail takes hold. (Check out the giant rooster aside Donut Whole before indulging inside). The trail's 60 murals gains power in the North End, a Latino neighborhood where they're part of community art "devised to create opportunities for artists of color to use art for social change," says project director

Continued on page 18

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Corn dogs and brisket-topped poutine are a hallmark of the Q39 restaurant in Kansas City.

Hatman Jack's is a long-running Wichita institution specializing in hats and other clothing items.

Armando, who works with neighboring African Americans across the tracks to achieve "black and brown solidarity via art." Among these bold, bright murals, one stands out. It's painted across a row of grain silos, incorporating faces of area residents to portray the history of people of color in the Horizontes project—the largest, Armando declares, in North America. (For a self-guided mural trail, visit www.Horizontes.com.)

Black people have been pushed out of the original neighborhood they called home in 1870, when Wichita was founded. Close after the Civil War, they arrived "to chart their new lives on the new frontier," says curator Paris Cunningham of the Kansas African American Museum that's housed in the former Calvary Baptist Church of 1917. Here, we learn that schools were not segregated until 1906, when news of the practice reached Kansas. Fast-forward to 1958, when young activists held a drugstore sit-in—the first in the nation. Kansas was also the first state to foster a Black military unit in the Civil War; many vets often became Buffalo soldiers in settling the West.

Stories of settling the west come alive at the Old Cowtown Museum, an open-air representation of a town of 1865-1880. Stroll past 40 buildings, from a church and schoolhouse to the newspaper office, boardinghouse and barbershop, as interpreters reenact olden times.

Before admiring the Edward Hoppers at the stylish Wichita Art Museum, let's dive back into the beer and BBQ scene for sustenance. The Design District's Wichita Brewing Company's quarters are outfitted tongue-in-cheek in Mid-Mod style—vintage padded swivel chairs, sleek panthers as flower vases—as backdrop to an obsession that grew from guys brewing beer in a garage to a brewery that now favors IPAs and sours.

As to 'cue, the brisket and ribs hickory-smoked at B & C Barbecue are calling your name. The site is not your typical dive—rather, a vast and cheery hall in which to get your fix. And it's not far from the free trolley that roams Douglas Avenue.

Before you hit the road, hit the Allen House—the last Prairie-type home designed by starchitect Frank Lloyd Wright. Erected of brick in 1916, it's eons ahead of its time, boasting features like an attached garage heated by radiators, a monitored security system, a central vacuum system—and, of course, those famous FLW signatures: a strong horizontal line with geometrically-arranged windows under roof tiles in Japanese style. The front door is hidden from street view (and composed of look-right-in plate glass). Frank—good friends with the owners—actually slept here, divulges Burt Burngardt as he guides us to the reflecting pool. End the night at XY Bar, where the GLBT crowd swarms the dance floor. For further information: www.visitwichita.com.

EVERYTHING'S UP TO DATE....

First-timers to Kansas City, consult my account in Lavender May 2018. For recidivists like me, who crave a fix of KC every year or two, let's discover what's new, or what's been hiding in plain sight. Start with the bounty of fountains (over 200) that invigorate the city. Country Club Plaza's shopping mecca boasts many, from Neptune saved from salvage to another celebrating Churchill chatting with his wife to the iconic H.C. Nichols masterpiece: mermen, horses, crocodiles and more. (Self-guide tours: www.kcfountains.com).

I stayed at the brand-new 21C, star of a collection of way-way forward boutique hotels known for their roving, man-sized plastic penguins and rotating exhibits (free access 24/7) celebrating what's often (okay: always) controversial art.

Nothing controversial about Savoy, its revitalization of a famed local restaurant, including the booth favored by Harry Truman. Today dine on eats like tortellini stuffed with escargot; Missouri trout with cornbread salad and fried oysters; or Mom's pork roast gentrified with cardamom coffee, smoked peaches and pickled blueberries.

But first, a tipple at Monarch, an ultra-classy new bar that puts all others to shame; it's named for the butterflies that migrate through KC. Above the central bar float 1,000 white butterflies sculpted by art students. Monarch's owner, an architect, and his cocktail-guru partner visited London ("the city with the best bars") for inspiration for what's become "a pretty place for pretty people." The menu of unique and camera-worthy cocktails merits a reservation.

Commemorate the 100th anniversary of Prohibition at a new craft distillery that celebrates its demise. J. Rieger & Co. offers tours (don't miss the floor-to-floor slide) and cocktails constructed with elegant, house-made spirits.

KC's Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art's collection spans 5,000 years, but the hit of the season is actually outside the museum's walls. Scottish artist Andy Goldsworthy, who works with time and nature in tandem, is creating "Walking Wall," constructed from stones that workers continually move from the end of the wall to its start, making the wall meander. Then meander, yourself, to the nearby Plaza to JJ's, a classic steakhouse breathing with new life via a menu favoring great KC steaks, rack of lamb in celery root-Dijon cream, and duck ravioli.

Then, time to try the new kids on the culinary scene, starting with Banksia, an Aussie-focused breakfast hit that knows how to deliver on avo toast and corn-zucchini fritters, or (yikes!) vegemite on toast. Pick up a classy macaron for later on. Or now. Parlor is more of a food hall than a living room. Migrate among seven food stands (Korean to fried chicken, sliders to pizza) plus craft beers, cocktails and people-watching.

Or, let's talk KC BBQ. An app directs folks to over 100 stops, from shacks to snazzy. Over on the Kansas side, Slap's (as in Slow Like A Pig) was launched by two contest-winning bros who deliver on everything from smoked turkey and sausage to ribs, brisket and beyond. Don't be daunted by the line; it's worth it.

Q39, with outposts in KC and Overland Park, offers "new-school barbecue," according to CIA-trained chef/ owner Rob Mager, who's headed Hilton and Four Seasons kitchens. He swears by a "scratch" kitchen to produce everything from his "modern" sides (think: apple- cabbage slaw or cassoulet) to chipotle sausage. He believes in quick cooking—none of this 36-hours-over-coals business. And the best-selling brisket proves his point. So do the ribs. The burger stuffed with burnt ends. The corn dogs crammed with pork belly. The brisket-topped poutine. Hungry for a visit? Check out www.visitKC.com. ∎

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EAT THE MENU | BY BRADLEY TRAYNOR | PHOTOS BY MIKE HNIDA

CECIL'S DELI

Cecil's Deli has been a St. Paul mainstay for 70 years.

In a world that's constantly changing and a restaurant scene that's even more ephemeral, there's a simple comfort in knowing, come what may, you can still grab a big, fat reuben with all the fixings just down the street. And that's exactly what residents of St. Paul's Highland Park neighborhood (and far beyond) have been saying about Cecil's Deli for the last 70 years.

Yes, 70 years. Indeed, Harry S. Truman was president when Cecil and Faye Glickman opened their deli doors for the first time in July 1949. Today, daughter Sheila Levanthal and her husband David, along with three generations of their family, are carrying Cecil and Faye's passion for food into the 21st century. Lucky for us.

Cecil's is the perfect trifecta of restaurant, bakery, and delicatessen.

A few weeks back, a couple friends and I were fortunate enough to take a walk down culinary memory lane and experience this family run institution firsthand. And, boy, did we learn a thing or two.

Let's start with the menu. At Cecil's, nobody's going without options. There are over 150 items on offer at present. If you can't find something to get excited about, you're not trying. In fact, the hardest part is trying to narrow down the list of delicious options.

We managed. Barely.

On this particularly brisk autumn night, we started with a steaming bowl of chicken soup with matzo balls. All the soups are scratch-made at Cecil's. And it shows. The chicken soup is comfort food at its best with satisfying, stick-to-your-ribs matzo balls. The borscht was another table favorite. This homemade sweet and sour cabbage soup with beef hit all the high notes: rich, tangy and substantial.

You could spend a lifetime working your way through the super long list of sandwiches at Cecil's, but I'll save you some time. Start with a reuben. After all, that's what they're known for. And what's not to love? Corned beef, swiss cheese and sauerkraut stacked on thick, dark rye bread, topped with Cecil's special sauce. If you only order one thing, make sure it's a reuben. Save all the other sandwich delicacies for future trips (of which there will be many).

If you do venture beyond the staples, I can highly recommend the Sasha. This unique little number combines hot brisket pastrami, a fried egg, swiss cheese piled high on caraway rye bread. The special sauce on this sammy is "bird sauce," a zesty Cecil's creation that's been on the menu for the last 50 years.

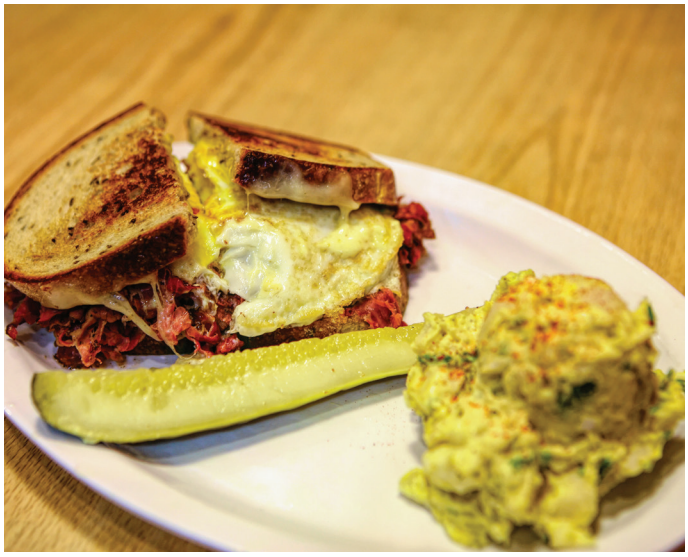
Sides are often looked upon as an afterthought, but I think they're just as important as the main course. And nothing pairs better with a reuben than a fresh scoop of potato salad and coleslaw. The potato salad is legendary at Cecil's and the coleslaw comes in two versions: creamy and sweet & sour. Both are divine, but I could've sidled up to a double helping of the

Continued on page 22

Cecil's matzo ball soup and borscht are perfect starters for your dining experience.

Don't miss out on Cecil's stellar cream cheese blintzes.

No mere side dish, the potato knishes are an excellent addition to your Cecil's meal.



The signature Sasha is a hot brisket pastrami that's to die for.

creamy coleslaw and made it a meal all on its own. With a reuben for dessert, that is.

In addition to soups, sandwiches and sides, Cecil's mammoth menu is replete with Jewish deli classics that deserve a place at your probably ever-dwindling table landscape. Our motto was, keep the food coming. And they did.

Of course, we ordered the knish. These handmade, potato-filled pockets are a perfect starter or side dish. Just make sure you order enough for everyone to have their own. We also made room (on the table and in our stomachs, though I'm not quite sure how) for an order of blintzes. These sweet, ricotta-filled crepe-like pillows of happiness melt in the mouth and brought more than one smile to our table. Especially, when topped with jam and sour cream.

After what seemed like all-the-bites, we somehow had room for dessert. At Cecil's there are plenty of sweet treats, both on the menu and at the deli counter itself. If you're not able to pack in another bite at the table, grab a few pastries to go. The hamantaschen are plentiful and packed with a variety of flavors. If you've never had one, think melt-in-your-mouth cookie stuffed with yummy fillings like cherry, almond and apricot.

We ended our journey across the menu with a heaping helping of warm cherry cobbler. Somewhat similar to strawberry shortcake, draped with cherries, ice cream and ample whipped cream, the three of us were unable to finish the entire bowl. A valiant effort, nonetheless.

A trip to Cecil's is about great food, sure, but it's also about paying tribute to tradition. And celebrating family. The way Sheila and Dave continue to celebrate Cecil and Faye's lifelong passion for food with their family and all of us to this day. A fact that likely ensures Cecil's presence on Cleveland Avenue for decades to come. ▮

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651 Cleveland Ave.
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www.cecilsdeli.com

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MILLENNIUM
MINNEAPOLIS

By Kassidy Tarala

2019-20 WINTER WHAT TO DO GUIDE

It's that time of year again: the daylight leaves us by 4 p.m., and the streets of the Twin Cities clear as everyone shuffles into the extensive skyway system to escape the bitter cold. While visitors might be shocked to see fat tire bikes trudging through piles of snow and the brave souls in shorts (shorts!) shoveling their driveways, true Minnesotans know that winter is just another challenge we aren't afraid to defeat. So grab your favorite hot dish, throw on your millions of sweaters, and hit up one (or all) of these classic Minnesotan winter activities.

TWIN CITIES FARMERS MARKETS

Minneapolis and St. Paul
Through April 26, 2020
Free
mplsfarmersmarket.com
stpaulfarmersmarket.com

In other (weaker) states, farmers markets are a thing of the summer and fall. But in Minnesota, they're a year-round festivity. Whether you're shopping around for the perfect Christmas tree, wreaths, seasonal produce, or a cozy mug of hot chocolate, the Minneapolis and St. Paul farmers markets make for a fun outdoor adventure no matter the season (take that, Polar Vortex!).

2019 HOLIDAZZLE

Loring Park, Minneapolis
Through Dec. 22
Free
holidazzle.com

Nothing says "winter in Minnesota" quite like Holidazzle. This year's festival includes all the classic family holiday films, fireworks, a kids zone, interactive art and games, singing, and more. The perfect event for people of all ages, Holidazzle will give you something special to do whenever out-of-town family comes by for a visit.

HOLIDAZZLE
Photo courtesy of Dusty Hoskovec Photography via Holidazzle.com

RAGING ART ON
Photo by Jade Patrick, art by Barret Lee

BENTLEYVILLE TOUR OF LIGHTS

Duluth
Through Dec. 26
Suggested donation
www.bentleyvilleusa.org

Get in the holiday spirit with the largest free walk-through lighting display in the United States with the Bentleyville Tour of Lights! Located on the shores of Lake Superior, five million lights shine upon 20 acres of park land for visitors to stroll about. Expect some complimentary hot cocoa and roasted marshmallows, and kids will get a chance to meet Santa and his reindeer at Bentleyville.

RAGING ART ON

Gamut Gallery, Minneapolis
Dec. 4-21
Free
gamutgallerympls.com

With more than 40 artists, Raging Art On at Minneapolis' Gamut Gallery is a fun holiday pop-up shop perfect for every art lover. Back for its eighth year, the Raging Art On show will be open for three weeks and will feature all sorts of artsy gifts, from handmade apparel and jewelry to housewares and more. After all, there's no better way to shop for your loved ones during the holidays than by perusing a bounty of local artists' creations.

DESTINATION WINTER ST. PAUL

CHS Field, St. Paul
Dec. 6-Feb. 22, 2020
Prices vary
visitsaintpaul.com

There's nothing quite like wintertime in St. Paul. Skate the iconic outdoor rink while surrounded by twinkling lights at the annual Wells Fargo WinterSkate, take advantage of the abundance of snow at the Securian SuperSlide at CHS Field, enjoy the Greatest Day Parade with friends and family, and so much more. Food and drinks will be available for purchase, and heat lamps will be available to warm up between all of the winter fun.

DESTINATION WINTER SAINT PAUL
Photo courtesy of Visit Saint Paul

Image by Roxi Manacoochi

Photo by Eric Richard Magnussen, courtesy of Blake Zidell & Associates

ROXI MANACOOCHI'S CHRISTMAS CABARET

LUSH, Minneapolis
Dec. 6-7
$12-15
lushmpls.com

Who says Christmas isn't for adults? Join Roxi Manacoochi's Christmas Cabaret at LUSH for a night of your favorite holiday jingles, impressive choreography, costumes, and live vocals. This year's costars are Paul Gutmann and the Aquanetts.

THE ROSE ACADEMY OF BURLESQUE STUDENT SHOWCASE

The Pourhouse Downtown, Minneapolis
Dec. 8
$8.55-12.82
thepourhousempls.com

Come celebrate the Roses in Bloom at the Rose Academy of Burlesque Student Showcase at the Pourhouse Downtown. Starring Shimmy LaRoux of Chicago and headmistress Deeva Rose and hosted by Foxy Tann, the showcase will leave you in awe of the Rose Academy students' impressive performances.

WINTER WANDERING

Gooseberry Falls State Park, Two Harbors
Dec. 12
dnr.state.mn.us

Looking to appreciate the winter scenery outside of the cities? Head to Two Harbors (just outside of Duluth) for a peaceful walk through Gooseberry Falls State Park. The walk will feature history, nature, and geology with a stroll through the park and a conversation with a naturalist beside the fireplace at the Visitor Center. Hiking sticks, snowshoes, ski poles, and cleats are encouraged depending on weather conditions.

BENDELACREME & JINKX MONSOON: ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS ATTENTION

Cedar Cultural Center, Minneapolis
Dec. 13
$35-100
thecedar.org

All hail the queens! Join BenDeLaCreme and Jinkx Monsoon at their holiday extravaganza, All I Want For Christmas Is Attention. Between the songs and the eggnog, the two will surely be getting the attention they deserve. Seating is available as general admission (first come, first served) and Center Section VIP.

HOLIDAY IN THE HEARTLAND

Dakota Jazz Club, Minneapolis
Dec. 13-14
$35-150
oneheartland.org

With music by Har Mar Superstar, silent and live auctions, presentation of the annual One Heartland Heart of Hope Award, and more, the Dakota Jazz Club's Holiday in the Heartland will get you in the holiday giving spirit. After being welcomed with champagne and a silent auction, guests will enjoy a dinner and program, followed by a live auction and closing remarks.

WWE TLC: TABLES, LADDERS & CHAIRS

Target Center, Minneapolis
Dec. 15
$25-500
targetcenter.com

WWE is returning to Minneapolis for its first Pay-Per-View in more than two years. The titular Tables, Ladders & Chairs matches will feature Roman Reigns vs. King Corbin, Becky Lynch & Charlotte Flair vs. the Kabuki Warriors, and more. Card is subject to change.

CHRISTMAS AT HOGWARTS: HARRY POTTER DRAG TEA

The Lynhall, Minneapolis
Dec. 15
$13 for tickets, $15-25 for tea menus
www.facebook.com/FlipPhone

A *Harry Potter*-themed drag tea party is exactly what we never knew we needed until now. This child-friendly drag show will feature Joe Loney, Francis Reine, and Trixi Del Mar. Sip on some chamomile while drag Draco Malfoy shows you what really goes down at Hogwarts during Christmastime.

A MINNI XMAS

7th St. Entry, Minneapolis
Dec. 16
$10-12
first-avenue.com

Join BdotCroc, OKnice, Solana, Honee Jones, and DJ Nanobyte at 7th St. Entry for a not-so-traditional Christmas party. Tickets are available in advance for $10 or $12 on the day of the show.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE LIVE IN CONCERT

Minnesota Orchestra, Minneapolis
Dec. 21-22
$40-118
minnesotaorchestra.org

It's officially Christmastime when *It's a Wonderful Life* returns. Join the Minnesota Orchestra to view the classic holiday film accompanied live by the Minnesota Orchestra and the Minnesota Chorale. Don't forget to bring a box of tissues!

SNOWTA NYE FESTIVAL

The Armory, Minneapolis
Dec. 30-31
$180-220
armorymn.com

Make sure 2019 ends with a bang at the Snowta NYE Festival at The Armory in Minneapolis. Zeds Dead will headline on Dec. 30, and several performers including Doctor P, Big Gigantic, Zomboy, Juice Wrld, and several others will take the stage. A countdown set by Ganja White Night will be the perfect farewell to 2019 and hello to 2020.

MAMMA MIA! DRAG BRUNCH

Union Rooftop, Minneapolis
Dec. 31
Ticket prices TBA
www.facebook.com/FlipPhone

Here we go again! What better way to ring in the new year than with a drag Meryl Streep? Join Flip Phone for another one of their famous Union Rooftop drag brunches. Sing along to your favorite *Mamma Mia!* hits with Sasha R Cassadine, Mercedes Iman Diamond, Lila Vera, and Jaidynn Dior Fierce of *RuPaul's Drag Race.*

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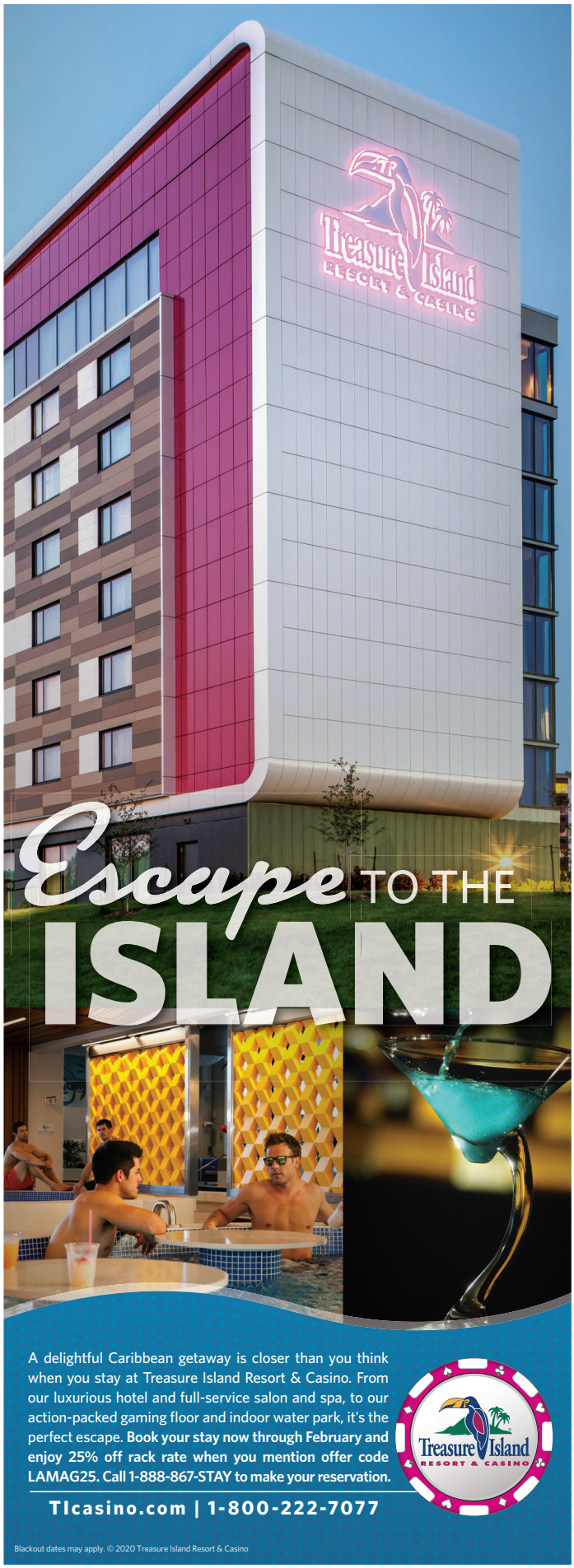
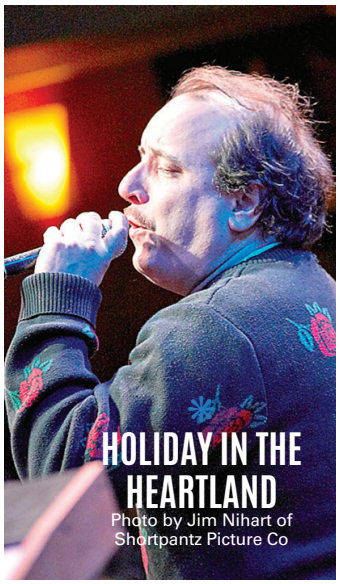




WRESTLEPALOOZA XVI

First Avenue, Minneapolis
Jan. 3-4, 2020
$27-35
first-avenue.com

F1rst Wrestling brings the entertainment of pro wrestling without the price tag of pro wrestling. For just $27-35, you can snag a ticket to see Wrestlepalooza XVI at First Avenue. Start 2020 off right and enjoy some of the very best of Minnesota wrestling.

POLAR PLUNGE 2020

Various locations
Jan. 17-March 19, 2020
plungemn.org

Are you even a Minnesotan if you don't willingly throw yourself into freezing cold water? Form a group or brave the chilly ice water solo, either way, there are plenty of Polar Plunges to choose from throughout Minnesota. If you don't want to take the plunge (who can blame you?), you can also just make a donation; proceeds go the Special Olympics Minnesota.

WINTER FROLIC

Snake River Fur Post, Pine City
Jan. 18, 2020
$6-10
mnhs.org

Come to the Snake River Fur Post in Pine City for the Winter Frolic, an outdoor adventure featuring lessons about winter travel during the fur trade and activities like throwing a curling stone, a round of Ojibwe snow snake, and snowshoeing along two miles of trails. Warm up indoors next to the fireplace with a mug of hot chocolate where you can learn about other historic games.

ART SHANTY PROJECTS

Bde Unma, Minneapolis
Jan. 18-Feb. 9, 2020
Suggested donation
artshantyprojects.org

In Minnesota, we do just about everything on the ice. Which is why it's not surprising that you can now meet and mingle with local artists on the frozen over lake of Bde Unma in Minneapolis. Art Shanty Projects supports the engagement between artists and their audiences to raise awareness of their projects and promote community involvement. Plus, it's a memory in the making you and the family will cherish forever.

U.S. POND HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIPS

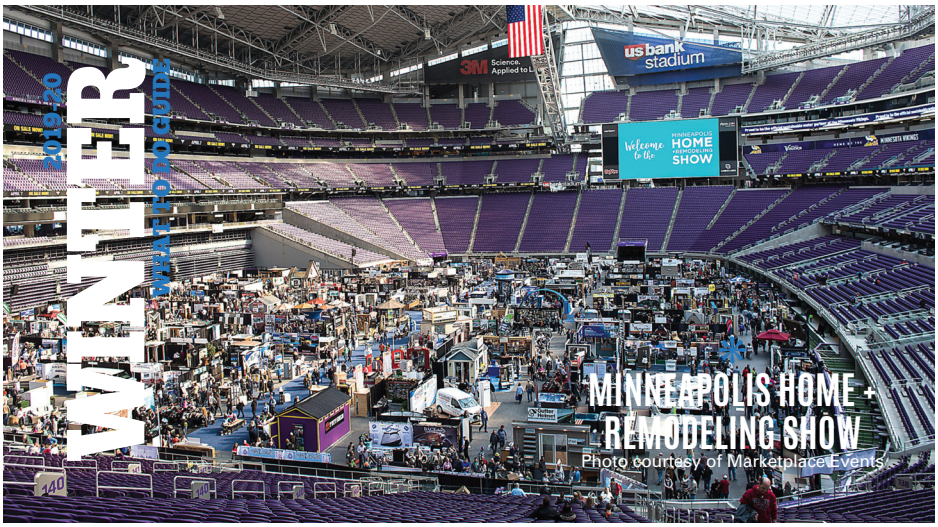
Lake Nokomis, Minneapolis
Jan. 23-26, 2020
uspondhockey.com

It's perhaps the biggest event in the State of Hockey: the U.S. Pond Hockey Championships. Since 2006, these championships have brought Minnesotans young and old together to celebrate the sport of hockey played the way nature intended: out on the pond!

SAINT PAUL WINTER CARNIVAL

Downtown St. Paul
Jan. 23-Feb 2, 2020
Free
wintercarnival.com

It's the 134th year of the Saint Paul Winter Carnival. That's right, this St. Paul tradition started in 1886 and has only grown in popularity since. Known for its snow sculpting competitions, parades, food, games, and more, the Saint Paul Winter Carnival is a great way to get outdoors this winter… and more importantly, to enjoy it!



MINNEAPOLIS HOME + REMODELING SHOW
Photo courtesy of MarketplaceEvents

MINNEAPOLIS HOME AND REMODELING SHOW

U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis
Jan. 24-26, 2020
$8-10
minneapolishomeandremodelingshow.com

Whether you're a home and interior design aficionado or you just want a $10 tour of the massive U.S. Bank Stadium (hey, no one's judging), the Minneapolis Home and Remodeling Show is a unique way to get out of the cold this winter while still making the most of the season. With a whole slew of exhibitors, celebrity appearances, valuable tips, and more, the Minneapolis Home and Remodeling Show is perfect for anyone looking to remodel their home.

TWINSFEST 2020

Target Field, Minneapolis
Jan. 24-25, 2020
Ticket prices TBA
mlb.com

Calling all Twins fans! TwinsFest 2020 is upon us. Presented by Kwik Trip, this celebration of all things Minnesota Twins is one of the largest fundraisers for the Twins Community Fund, which works to change the lives of kids across Twins Territory by getting them involved in youth baseball and softball. With fun and games and opportunities to meet the players, TwinsFest 2020 is great for the whole family.

WINTER ADVENTURE FAMILY DAY

Forest History Center, Grand Rapids
Jan. 25, 2020
$6-10
mnhs.org

When the family is feeling a little too cooped up at home during the winter, the Winter Adventure Family Day at Forest History Center is a great way to get outdoors and beat the winter blues. From snowshoeing and bullet sled rides to horse-drawn sleigh rides and snowball slingshots, there's fun for everyone at Winter Adventure Family Day. Warm up with indoor wildlife presentations featuring live animals, music, games, and more.

LAKE HARRIET KITE FESTIVAL

Lake Harriet Park, Minneapolis
Jan. 25, 2020
Free
minneapolisparks.org

Let's go fly a kite! A great way to meet up with the rest of your community, the Lake Harriet Kite Festival will feature kites of all shapes, sizes, colors, and themes filling the sky above Lake Harriet. There will also be snowshoeing, ice fishing, and a marshmallow roast.

WINTER BALL 2020: THE '20S ROAR AGAIN

Marriott City Center, Minneapolis
Feb. 1-2. 2020
$50-175
wishesandmore.org

Get your fellow flappers together and head to the Marriott City Center for Wishes & More's Winter Ball 2020: The '20s Roar Again. A celebration of 1920s glam and a welcome to 2020, the Winter Ball 2020 will be serving up some serious speakeasy vibes. From feathers and fringe to swinging and shimmying, this year's Winter Ball will be one where anything goes.

FUR FLEE 13: GET LUCKY!

Barker's Island Inn, Superior, WI
March 5-8, 2020
$60-115
www.facebook.com/FurFlee

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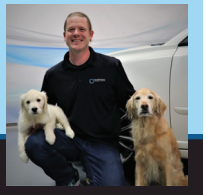

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PARADISE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

BY CHRIS TARBOX
PHOTOS BY CHRIS TARBOX

Picture, if you will, exiting an airplane and walking through a small, cozy little airport after a three-hour flight. At first glance, the airport isn't too different from the smaller, regional airports you may have patronized once or twice in your life. As you reach the end of the concourse, you see that baggage claim is straight ahead. You push open the door. Sure enough, baggage claim is steps away, but not before emerging outdoors and being greeted by a menagerie of vibrant palm trees, clear, sunny skies, and an impossibly gorgeous mountain range serving as the picturesque backdrop to the getaway of a lifetime.

This, my friends, is the Palm Springs experience.

Located in the Coachella Valley of Riverside County, California, Palm Springs has long been a popular resort and tourism destination for decades, and has evolved consistently over the years to appeal to a wide spectrum of visitors and residents.

Palm Canyon Drive is the veritable main street of downtown Palm Springs.

Chill Bar is one of many GLBT bars that call Palm Springs home.

Darrell Baum and Osamu Sagara are the owners of Wabi Sabi Japan Living in downtown Palm Springs.

"It was primarily a retirement community," said Randy Garner of Visit Palm Springs. "The city has done a really good job of developing the downtown [area]. The average age is really going down, so it's a lot younger crowd. I would also attribute that to the fact we've got a lot of people from L.A. that came over, bought up some of the homes and fixed them up, and that's the younger, more affluent crowd."

Of course, being a southwestern desert town, it can get hot. Especially in the summer time. But in the winter? The general lack of humidity makes even a 95-degree day downright comfy, especially come late afternoon when the ubiquitous mountainside allows for an earlier sunset. Pool parties all year long? Yessir, don't mind if I do!

Palm Springs is also home to a vibrant GLBT community, as well as plenty of gay-owned and gay-friendly businesses.

"It's not that they're just coming to visit, but they also work here and they're very integrated into the community," said Garner.

Palm Springs boasts several GLBT bars and establishments, including the Tool Shed, The Barracks, and Chill Bar, and whether you're staying in town by yourself or with a partner, there's no shortage of great resorts to stay at. One such destination is La Dolce Vita (www.ladolcevitaresort.com), a men's-only resort and spa located in the Deep Well neighborhood. This intimate, one-story bastion of relaxation offers two outdoor heated pools, a hot tub, a steam room, outdoor dining areas, weekend social hours, and best of all, an on-site professional men's spa where you can spoil yourself with a deep-tissue massage to get you nice and relaxed for the many pleasures that Palm Springs has to offer.

And why not start with the food? Palm Springs is home to a vast array of excellent dining establishments. Start with LULU California Bistro (www.lulupalmsprings.com), a snazzy spot with mid-modern architecture where you'd imagine the movie stars of yesteryear to stop by for dinner (especially if it's for LULU's signature meatloaf!).

Hopefully your dinner will ease you into a comfy slumber, because come morning, it's high time for some adventurin'. The entire Coachella Valley is a hotbed of natural wonders, offering countless opportunities for sightseeing, hiking, and A-plus photo ops. You can do all these things and more thanks to Palm Springs Desert Adventures Red Jeep Tours (red-jeep.com), who will take you for the ultimate desert paradise adventure.

Consider signing up for their signature tour of the San Andreas Fault, a three-hour sojourn that's one part sightseeing delight and one part natural history lesson thanks to the company's roster of extremely knowledgable tour guides. On this tour, you'll learn about the abundant flora and fauna of the San Andreas Fault Zone, the aquifer water source that the valley rests upon, the culture of the native Cahuilla tribe, and the twisting valleys and canyons that you'll get to explore up-close and personal.

After your desert escapades, head back to downtown Palm Springs to enjoy a fantastic lunch courtesy of Tommy Bahama Marlin Bar (www.tommybahama.com). Kick back in their canopied outdoor patio where a cooling mist will counteract the hot midday sun, and nosh on as many of their tasty apps and entrees as you can muster (My suggestion? Start with the coconut shrimp and loaded pork tots, and polish off a bowl of lobster mac 'n cheese).

La Dolce Vita Resort boasts two heated pools and an on-site professional spa.

Old Las Palmas offers a bevy of architectural classics to check out.

Continued on page 34

Destination PSP sells originally-designed clothes, souvenirs and housewares.

After lunch, it's time to spoil yourself with some afternoon shopping! There are lots and lots of lovely shops in Palm Springs, and one that sticks out in particular is Destination PSP (destinationpsp.com), which produces originally-designed merchandise ranging from souvenirs and t-shirts to wall clocks and pool accoutrement. Owned by Jeffrey Bernstein, Destination PSP also produces and designs merch and marketing materials for local groups and events such as the Palm Springs International Film Festival, the Desert AIDS Project, and the Palm Springs Cultural Center.

After your shopping and general wandering needs are met on Palm Canyon Drive, stop by for a dinner for the ages at The Tropicale Restaurant (thetropicale.com). Like many other eateries in town, this jazzy spot feels like a place where Sinatra would be right at home, with an in-house piano player and a gorgeous patio that's practically enclosed by a fleet of palm trees. I was particularly fond of their crispy boneless Southern fried chicken, but luckily their menu has something for everyone.

One defining feature of Palm Springs has been its long history of playing host to celebrities and politicians. Thanks to guide Jade Nelson of P.S. Walk With Me (pswalk.com), I got to learn a little more about not only the eye-popping architecture of the legendary Old Las Palmas neighborhood, but also some of the stars who called this neighborhood home. During our walking tour of this historic district, we stopped by Our Lady of Solitude, where JFK himself worshipped during his visits; we checked out homes designed by master architects Alvah Hicks and Donald Wexler; and we scoped out former homes of stage and screen legends Clark Gable, Liberace, Stan Laurel, and Laurence Harvey.

Heading back to Palm Canyon Drive, I stopped for lunch at Las Casuelas Terraza (www.lascasuelas.com), a fantastic product of four generations of family recipes from the Delgado family. The restaurant boasts a terrific outdoor ambiance with its three distinct patio areas, and offers over 100 varieties of tequila. Give their Machaca burrito a try, as well as their amazing homemade guacamole.

The mid-modern magic continues at dinner time with Trio (triopalmsprings.com), an electric American restaurant with a fantastic design aesthetic (I can never say no to an orange color scheme), friendly staff, and a bounty of fantastic feastables. Loosen up with the delish Forever Marilyn cocktail, indulge your appetizer impulses with their hand-breaded calamari and bacon-wrapped dates, and savor the grilled swordfish dish before calling it a day with their outstanding apple cobbler.

Now, after starting your previous days with Jeep and walking tours, what better way to start the next day on your Palm Springs stay than with a trip up a mountain? Thanks to Palm Springs Aerial Tramway (pstramway.com), I got a birds-eye view of the majesty of Chino Canyon as we were wowed with a ten-minute trip on the world's largest rotating tram car, ascending to 8,516 feet to the heart-stopping views of Mt. San Jacinto State Park. Boasting 50 miles of hiking trails, this patch of wilderness offers amazing views of the Coachella Valley below, along with a natural history museum, two restaurants, and observation decks. Be sure to bring a sweater, as the temperature drops a good 30 to 40 degrees upon reaching the mountain station.

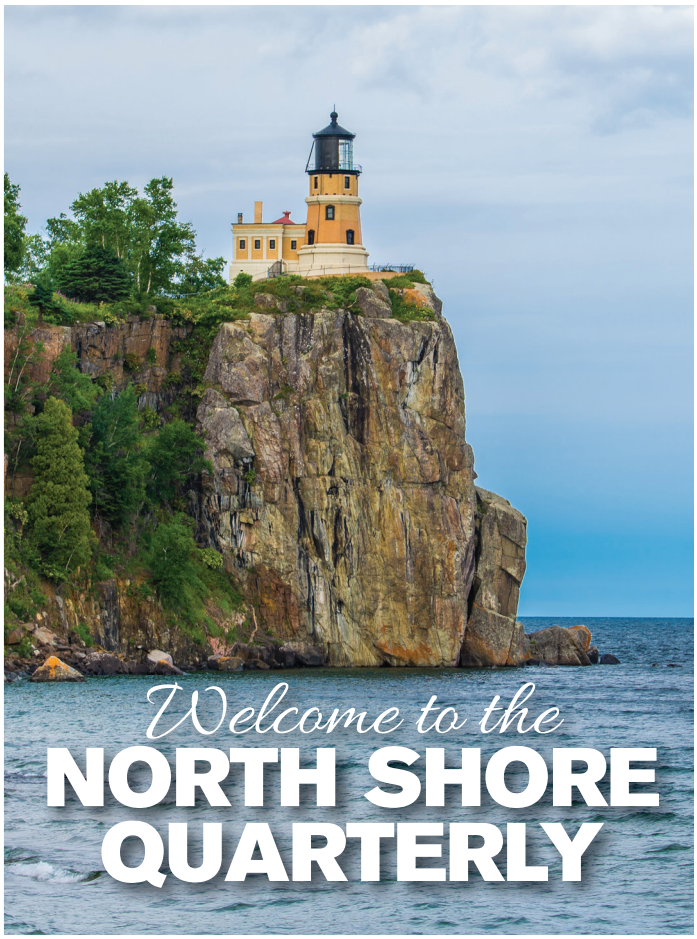
Once you return to the lower levels of terra firma, grab a quick bite to eat at Grand Central (www.grandcentralpalmsprings.com) for some stellar California cuisine, including a variety of different burgers and steaks. Afterwards, enjoy some international flair with a sake tasting at Wabi Sabi Japan Living (www.wabisabijapanliving.com), a home goods store owned by the couple of Darrell Baum and Osamu Sagara. The couple, who travels to Japan yearly, decided to bring the Land of the Rising Sun back to Palm Springs with authentic Japanese pottery, clothing, dinnerware, beer, and more.

It's difficult to properly explain the enchanting allure of Palm Springs. A magical amalgam of environmental wonder, friendly people, architectural history, and progressive ideals, Palm Springs is a perfect getaway for those cold winter months. Trust me, when you're greeted by those palm trees outside of the airport, you'll know that you made the right choice.

For more information on GLBT destinations in Palm Springs, visit www.visitgaypalmsprings.com. ▮

Palm Springs is home to many classy and opulent restaurants, including The Tropicale.

Visitors can explore the natural beauty of the San Andreas Fault Zone in neighboring Indio, California.



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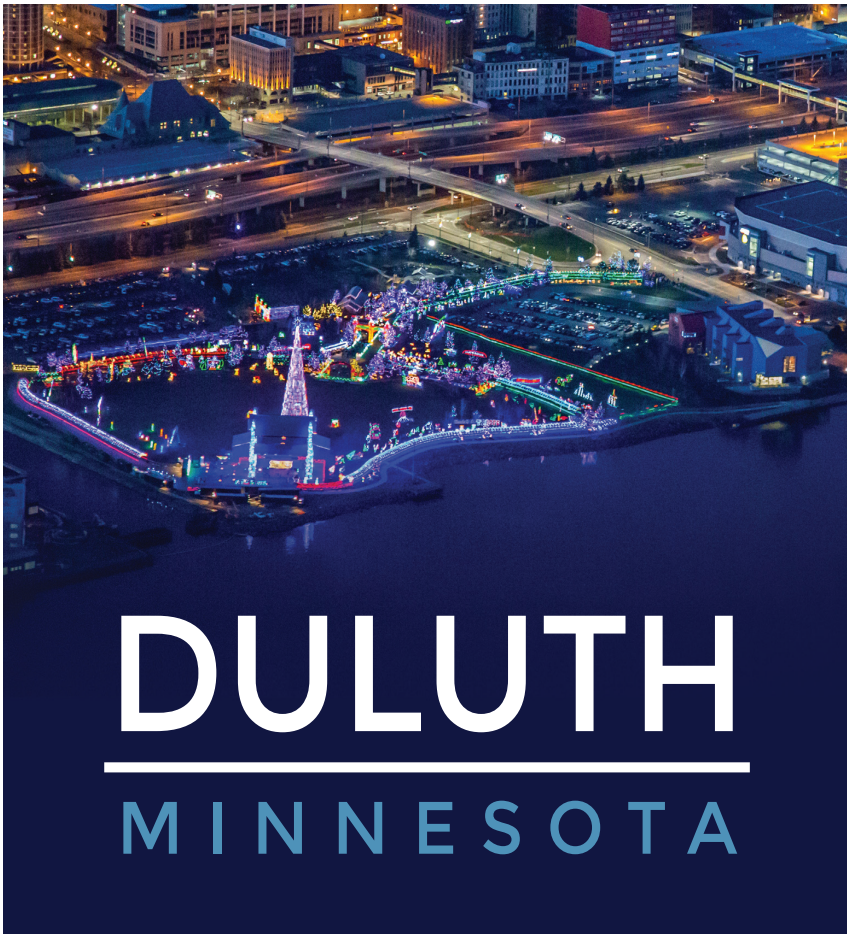

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Mike and Jen's Cocoa Mix is the perfect gift for the winter season. Photo courtesy of Mike and Jen's Cocoa Mix

BY KASSIDY TARALA

FOR THE LOVE OF COCOA

Dean Packingham shares the sweet story of how he started his Duluth-based hot chocolate company, Mike & Jen's Cocoa Mix.

If you're a fan of hot chocolate (which, let's face it, we all are in this six-month-long-winter state), you might have noticed something about most instant hot chocolate mixes on the shelf: you can't pronounce half of the ingredient list. Like all processed foods, instant hot chocolate mix is loaded with chemicals.

While Dean Packingham was serving up a mug of cozy hot cocoa for his daughter, Jen, he read over the ingredients and decided that he and his family deserve better than an endless list of chemicals. In fact, he decided everyone deserves better. So with the help of his then-13-year-old son, Mike, and then-9-year-old Jen, Packingham made his own hot chocolate mix.

"I said to Jen that we should make our own hot cocoa mix, and she said 'YEAH!' Then I said we should make the best in the world, and she said 'YEAH!' Because I told her I was going to make the best in the world, I purchased more than 60 cocoa powders from around the world," Packingham says. "I also wanted it rich and creamy with just water, something I had never found in a mix, so I selected a rich and creamy whole milk powder for the mix."

Once Packingham came up with the perfect hot chocolate mix recipe, he and co-owner Amanda Cunningham founded Mike & Jen's Cocoa Mix.

"We have been best friends and co-workers for about 15 years. We knew we worked well together and after finding out that she loves spreadsheets, and I hate them, I knew it was a match! Since then, we've been on many crazy adventures and are still best friends. We call ourselves Lucy and Ethel. I'm Lucy because I come up with the crazy ideas, and she is my Ethel," Packingham says.

Amanda Cunningham, left, and Dean Packingham, right, are the owners of Mike and Jen's Cocoa Mix. Photo courtesy of Mike and Jen's Cocoa Mix

Mike & Jen's Cocoa Mix is now available throughout the Upper Midwest, especially in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Packingham says it's also stocked in about 300 stores, including Lund's and Byerly's and Kowalski's in the Twin Cities. It is also available for purchase on Amazon for those outside of the Midwest (or those who just don't want to make the trek to the nearest grocery store).

In addition to being on shelves throughout the Midwest and online, Packingham says he also likes to be involved in events throughout the community, especially in the winter months, which is what led to his next big idea: a food truck.

"When you own a hot cocoa business, you get invited to a lot of cold weather events. After being out in the cold on one too many occasions, we decided we needed a food truck! We couldn't decide on what to call a hot cocoa food truck, so we call it our Cocoa Mobile," he says. "We go to a lot of large events, and it has proven to be an incredible PR tool."

Not only is Mike & Jen's Cocoa Mix (and its Cocoa Mobile) an important part of the Duluth community (hot cocoa capital of the world), but Packingham says as a member of the GLBT community, it's important to represent the community as a small business owner.

"It's incredibly important to me as a small business owner. I came out later in life, and my kids have been nothing but supportive. My responsibility as a member of the GLBT community is to do everything I can as ethically as possible. It's important to me that we give back to causes that are supportive of GLBT issues," Packingham says.

In addition to the classic Mike & Jen's hot cocoa mix (all you need is 3 tablespoons of mix and 8 oz. of water), Packingham has expanded to other hot cocoa-inspired delicacies. Here are some recipes (courtesy of Mike & Jen's Cocoa Mix) recommended for every chocolate lover:

FROZEN HOT COCOA

1. Fill 8 oz. mug halfway with water and microwave for 1 minute.
2. Add a pack of Mike & Jen's Single Serve Cocoa Mix (3 tablespoons cocoa mix) and stir until dissolved.
3. Fill the rest of the mug with cold water and stir again.
4. For iced cocoa, pour into an ice-filled glass or add to a blender with 1 cup of ice and blend until smooth. Enjoy!

PEPPERMINT HOT COCOA

1. Start with The Classic (3 tablespoons mix, 8 ounces water).
2. Add crushed candy cane, Andes Mints or—for the grown-ups—peppermint schnapps. Enjoy!

MEXICAN HOT COCOA

1. Start with The Classic (3 tablespoons mix, 8 ounces water).
2. Add a pinch of cayenne pepper and ground cinnamon to the party.
3. Feeling really bold? Go for more than a pinch. Enjoy!

For more information, visit mikeandjens.com. ∎

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COMMUNITY | BY CHRIS TARBOX

Cruise Line Is It Anyway?

2018 and 2019 *Lavender* Cover and a Cruise winners Zaylore Stout and Beth Mejia recap their amazing cruise adventures.

Photo by Zaylore Stout

Beth Mejia and a friend took Celebrity Cruises' Summit on a tour of the American Northeast. Photo by Beth Mejia

As many of our readers may recall, the 2018 and 2019 Pride Editions of *Lavender* boasted lucky cover models who not only got the chance to represent the GLBT community for our biggest issue of both years, but won a cruise for two courtesy of Celebrity Cruises.

Last year's big winner was attorney and *Our Gay History in 50 States* author Zaylore Stout, and this year the honoree was North Memorial Health Foundation board member and Gay For Good National Vice Chair Beth Mejia. Both winners took their respective trips during the second half of this year: Stout and his partner Ore Lindenfeld took Celebrity Cruises' Equinox line from Fort Lauderdale to St. Thomas, Antigua, Barbados, the U.S. Virgin Islands, St. Lucia, and St. Maarten, while Mejia and a friend took Celebrity Cruises' Summit on a tour of the American Northeast.

"We started our travel in Newark, New Jersey at the Cape Liberty Port, leaving the evening of [Aug. 11, and] we got a beautiful view of Statue Of Liberty and Skyline of Manhattan," said Mejia. "We traveled along the east coast into Canada, starting our trip at St. John's Bay, then Bar Harbor, Maine, and finally spending a few days in Provincetown, Massachusetts."

Stout said that he and his partner had an absolute blast during their journey.

Zaylore Stout, left, was the 2018 Lavender Cover and a Cruise winner. Photo by Zaylore Stout

Beth Mejia, left, was this year's Cover and a Cruise winner. Photo by Beth Mejia

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REAL ESTATE

Photo by Beth Mejia

"Both the food and the service on the ship were amazing!" said Stout. "We had spa (massage and acupuncture) treatments. Beating the staff in a volleyball tournament (which we heard never happens) was fun. Eating the local cuisine on the islands was a must (roti, flying fish, and conch fritters were my favorite). Then there were the beautiful beaches and the beautiful blue waters. We met other amazing LGBTQ+ folx from around the world and sang karaoke together almost every night ("Seasons of Love", anyone?)"

Meanwhile, Mejia's east coast travels boasted a ton of fun memories.

"The best part of the trip was Canyon Ranch Spa, the celebrity-packed entertainment with the likes of Kristin Chenoweth, Katherine McPhee, her husband David Foster, and funnyman comedian Leslie Jordan from Will and Grace," said Mejia. "The food was fantastic, the service was amazing, [with] lots of fun themed parties each night."

Stout said that of all the memorable moments on his cruise, two moments stuck out in particular.

"First, we visited one of the oldest Jewish synagogues on U.S. soil," said Stout. "Built in 1833 for a congregation founded in 1792, it was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1997. It has sand floors and was quite a site to see."

The second moment was meeting Carolyn Forno, assistant director of the Women's Coalition of St. Croix.

Zaylore Stout and his partner traveled to St. Thomas, Antigua, Barbados, the U.S. Virgin Islands, St. Lucia, and St. Maarten. Photo by Zaylore Stout

"The center is highlighted in my book, *Our Gay History in 50 States*, so it was great to see and hear the stories of this center in person," said Stout. "Additionally, we learned that Director Forno was part of LGBTQ+ history herself when she and her wife were the first LGBT couple to adopt in the Caribbean."

Mejia said that she adored the quaintness that each east coast town had to offer.

"My favorite by far was Provincetown, which is known as one of the most open LGBTQ+ cities in the U.S.," said Mejia. "[A] special thank you to Vacaya for making my first cruise ever unforgettable." ▮

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